

Sukkah Building Laws in the Mishna

Introductory Questions:

- 1) How do we know that we are supposed to build sukkot on the festival of Sukkot? What are we supposed to be remembering and experiencing in the Sukkah?

- 2) What is the single most important “ingredient” or part of the sukkah?

SIZE AND AGE REQUIREMENTS

1 A Sukkah that is taller than 20 *amot*** is unfit. Rabbi Yehuda declares it fit. And if it is not as high as 10 *t'fakhim***, or if it does not have 3 walls, or if its light is greater than its shade, it is unfit.

For an old sukkah, the School of Shammai declares it unfit, but the School of Hillel declares it fit. And what is an “old sukkah?” Any that was made 30 or more days before Sukkot. However, if it was made in the name of Sukkot, even from the beginning of the year, it is fit.

מסכת סוכה

פרק א'

א סִכָּה שֶׁהִיא גְבוּהָה לְמַעַלָּה מֵעֶשְׂרִים
אַמָּה, פְּסוּלָה. רַבִּי יְהוּדָה מְבַשֵּׁיר.
וְשֵׁאִינָהּ גְבוּהָה עֲשָׂרָה מַפָּחִים, וְשֵׁאִין לָהּ
שָׁלֹשׁ דְּפָנוֹת, וְשִׁחֲמָתָה מְרַבָּה מִצִּלָּתָהּ,
פְּסוּלָה.

סִכָּה יִשְׁנָה, בֵּית שְׁמַאי פּוֹסְלִין, וּבֵית
הֵלֵל מְבַשֵּׁרִין. וְאִיזוֹ הִיא סִכָּה יִשְׁנָה, כָּל
שֶׁעָשְׂתָה קֹדֶם לְחַג שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם. אֲבָל אִם
עָשְׂתָה לְשֵׁם חַג, אֲפִלּוּ מִתְחִלַּת הַשָּׁנָה,
כִּשְׂרָה:

- 1) Read the footnote below and then use a ruler to take measurements of an *amah* and a *tefah* for you and your partner. What did you find out? Why would this method of measurement be problematic? How do you think the Rabbis overcame it?

** An *amah* and a *tefah* are rabbinic units of measure. An *amah* equaled the distance from the elbow to the tip of your middle finger. A *tefah* was a handbreadth (stretch out your fingers and measure from the end of your thumb to your the top of your pinkie).

2) Why would the height of the sukkah be an important characteristic to make a rule about? What would “too tall” or “too short” mean for the structure?

3) There is one very brief rule about the *s'khakh* that is mentioned here, but it is VERY important. What is it?

4) Why would the age of the sukkah affect whether or not it is fit/kosher or unfit for use? Think about which part of the sukkah actually makes a structure a sukkah.

SUKKAH COVERING & WALLS

סכך ודפנות

2 One who makes his sukkah under a tree, it is as if he made it inside the house. When a sukkah is on top of a sukkah, the upper one is kosher and the lower one is unfit. Rabbi Yehuda says, if no one is living in the upper one, the lower one is kosher.

ב העושה סכתו תחת האילן, כאלו
עשאה בתוך הבית. סכה על גבי סכה,
העליונה כשרה, והתחתונה פסולה. רבי
יהודה אומר, אם אין דיורין בעליונה,
התחתונה כשרה:

1) Why would building the sukkah under a tree make it equivalent to it being inside a house and, therefore, not kosher for use on Sukkot?

2) Can you imagine a situation where two sukkot are built one on top of the other? (Try not to read the mishna literally, i.e. when might a sukkah be directly above another one?).

3 If one spread a sheet over it because of the sun or under it because of falling leaves, or spread a sheet across the four posts of a bed, it is invalid. However, one may spread a sheet over the cross bar of a two-post bed.

ג פֶּרֶם עָלֶיהָ סָדִין מִפְּנֵי הַחֶמֶה, אוֹ תַּחְתֶּיהָ מִפְּנֵי הַנֶּשֶׁר, אוֹ שֹׁפֵרֶם עַל גְּבִי הַקִּינּוֹת, פְּסוּלָה. אָבֵל פּוֹרֵם הוּא עַל גְּבִי נִקְלִיטֵי הַמָּטָה:

5 Bundles of straw, bundles of wood, and bundles of brushwood must not be used for sukkah covering. Any that were untied are valid. All are fit to be used as walls.

ה חֲבִילֵי קֶשׁ וְחֲבִילֵי עֵצִים וְחֲבִילֵי יָרְדִין, אֵין מְסַבְּכִין בָּהֶן. וְכֵלֶן שֶׁהִתִּירָן, בְּעֵשְׂרוֹת. וְכֵלֶן בְּעֵשְׂרוֹת לְדַפְנוֹת:

6 One may cover with wood planks, according to Rabbi Yehuda. Rabbi Meir forbids it. If a board four *t'fahim* wide was placed over it, it is valid, but one may not sleep under it.

ו מְסַבְּכִין בַּנְּסָרִים, דְּבָרֵי רַבִּי יְהוּדָה. וְרַבִּי מֵאִיר אוֹסֵר. נָתַן עָלֶיהָ נֶסֶר שֶׁהוּא רָחֵב אַרְבָּעָה מַפָּחִים, בְּעֵשְׂרָה, וְכֵלֵבֶד שֶׁלֹא יִישֵׁן תַּחְתָּיו:

1) What rules about the roofing do these three mishnayot seem to emphasize? What do the Rabbis want to make sure happens?

2) Based on what you have learned here in the Mishna and what you already know, discuss some of the spiritual purposes of the Sukkah on the holiday of Sukkot. What do all of these say about humanity, God and the relationship between the two?
